**Before the**
**FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**
**Washington, D.C. 20554**



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| In the Matter of | ) | |
| | ) | |
| An Industry Coordination Committee | ) | ET Docket No. 99-34 |
| System for Broadcast Digital | ) | |
| Television Service | ) | |



# REPLY COMMENTS OF THE NATIONAL CABLE TELEVISION ASSOCIATION

The National Cable Television Association ("NCTA") hereby submits its reply comments in response to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in the above-captioned proceeding.[1] NCTA is the principal trade association of the cable television industry in the United States, representing cable television operators serving over 90 percent of the nation's cable television households, over 150 cable programming networks, and manufacturers of cable set-top boxes, cable modems and other equipment.

NCTA members will play a significant role in bringing digital television ("DTV") service to consumers throughout the nation. In furtherance of that goal, cable companies are rapidly upgrading their systems and increasing channel capacity in order to carry digital and high-definition programming. Cable program

[1] An Industry Coordination Committee System for Broadcast Digital Television Service, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, ET Docket No. 99-34, FCC 99-8, released February 3, 1999 ("Notice").

networks are leading the development of innovative digital and HDTV programming and services. The cable industry also is working with the Consumer Electronics Manufacturer's Association ("CEMA") and the Motion Picture Association of America ("MPAA") to develop standards that will ensure compatibility between TV sets and digital set-top boxes and protect copyrighted material.[2] And pursuant to the Navigation Device Order, Cable Television Laboratories (CableLabs) and its member companies are working with CEMA and consumer electronics retailers to facilitate the retail availability of consumer digital equipment by July 2000.[3]

With respect to the carriage of new broadcast digital signals, cable companies are engaged in retransmission consent discussions with broadcast companies to arrive at carriage arrangements for broadcast digital programming consistent with system channel capacity and consumer demand.

The Notice seeks comment on the establishment of an industry coordination committee to assist the Commission in the implementation of broadcast DTV service. The committee would "evaluate proposed changes to the DTV Table of

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[2] See e.g. Letter to Chairman William E. Kennard from Gary Shapiro, President, CEMA and Decker Anstrom, President and CEO, NCTA, April 16, 1999, stating that industries continue to work closely together "to define requirements that will allow integrated DTV receivers to connect directly with digital cable systems. We believe that this effort represents a significant step toward enabling consumers to enjoy the full capabilities of their cable systems while their digital television receivers deliver the highest resolution picture."

[3] Implementation of Section 304 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Commercial Availability of Navigation Devices, CS Docket No. 97-80, FCC 98-116, Report and Order, released June 24, 1998, 63 Fed. Reg. 38095 (July 15, 1998).

Allotments and perform other related functions."[4] As many broadcast parties envision it, the committee would analyze proposals in the DTV allotment and assignment process, evaluate operational and facilities applications, and have broad authority to address interference and other conflicts.[5]

NCTA has no quarrel with broadcasters getting together to coordinate DTV frequency use. But we share CEMA's concern about the scope of the committee's other functions.[6] In particular, NCTA agrees with CEMA that the coordinating committee's functions should not extend to the assignment or administration of the Program and System Information Protocol ("PSIP") adopted by the Advanced Television Systems Committee ("ATSC").

PSIP is one of the technical specifications that enables broadcast DTV stations, cable systems and others to transmit system information, such as transport stream identification ("TSIDs"), channel identification, and program guide data, to the viewer. As CEMA notes in its comments, the ATSC, under whose auspices PSIP was developed, is an inter-industry organization comprised of representatives from the broadcast, cable, consumer electronics, satellite and other industries -- all of which have an interest in establishing technical standards for digital

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4 Notice at 1.

5 See e.g., Comments of Association of Maximum Service Television, Inc. and the National Association of Broadcasters; Association of Local Television Stations, Inc.; Fox Television Stations, Inc.

6 See Comments of CEMA at 3.

television, including service information protocols, such as PSIP.[7] For the Commission to designate a broadcast industry coordination committee to evaluate and/or administer technical matters related to digital television *beyond* broadcast frequency coordination could result in such a committee ignoring the needs and concerns of other affected industries participating in the evolving digital television market.

As noted above, the cable industry is engaged in various initiatives to advance the deployment of digital television services. The cable industry expects to utilize multiple transport streams to support the delivery of video, audio and other digital-related services, consistent with the MPEG 2 Systems standard. These transport streams will emanate from a variety of sources, including satellite and local broadcast station transmitters. In processing the signals in the cable head-end for distribution, cable operators may need to assign unique identifiers to each transport stream within each cable system by using transport stream identification or TSIDs. These identifiers could overlap with PSIP information from broadcast stations and other delivery media unless there is coordination between the industries.

The involvement of all interested parties in the assignment or administration of PSIP is necessary to ensure that television receivers and set top boxes are capable of distinguishing between all of the various transport streams effectively.

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[7] Id.

For this reason, it is critical for the cable industry to have significant input into any decisions regarding the PSIP system and other technical issues related to cable carriage of digital signals. Because the proposed DTV Coordination Committee will, understandably, have a decided broadcast bent, it should not be used to address issues, such as PSIP, which affect many other industries. Instead, the Commission should allow market forces and, where necessary, inter-industry standards and coordination committees to work out these matters.

## CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated above, the Commission should not include consideration of technical matters beyond broadcast frequency coordination in the functions performed by the proposed DTV Coordination Committee.

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April 28, 1999